



U.S. Department of Justice

RONALD C. MACHEN JR.
*United States Attorney for the
District of Columbia*

*Judiciary Center
555 Fourth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530*

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

For Information Contact:

Public Affairs

(202) 514-6933

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District Man Found Guilty of Hate Crime and Related Offenses In Connection with Robbery and Beating

--Accomplice also found guilty of robbery and assault charges against two male teenagers--

WASHINGTON - A Superior Court jury has found two Southeast District of Columbia men, Michael Cowan, 23, and Vernon Long, 25, guilty of robbery and related offenses in connection with an attack on two young men as they were headed home on the evening before Thanksgiving 2009, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., and Metropolitan Police Department Chief Cathy L. Lanier, announced today. Cowan was additionally found guilty of having persisted in the attack upon one of the victims based upon Cowan's perception of the victim's sexual orientation.

Late yesterday, the jury found Cowan guilty of all four counts in the indictment, that is, two counts of Robbery, one count of Assault with a Dangerous Weapon - Bias Related Crime, and one count of Assault with Significant Injury - Bias Related Crime. Long was also found guilty of two counts of Robbery, as well as Assault with a Dangerous Weapon and Assault with Significant Injury, although the jury did not find that Long was motivated by prejudice against the victim's sexual orientation. Judge Ronna Beck presided over the trial. Sentencing is scheduled for July 26, 2010. Under the Superior Court Voluntary Sentencing Guidelines, both defendants face a possible sentence of over 10 years in prison, and Cowan faces the possibility of enhanced penalties based upon the jury's finding that he acted with prejudice against the victim's sexual orientation.

The evidence at trial established that shortly after 8:00 p.m. on November 25, 2009, which was the day before Thanksgiving, the two male victims, 17 and 19 years old, were leaving a convenience store in the 2400 block of Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, SE, having bought some supplies for one of their mothers. As they were leaving the store, they walked past Cowan and Long, who were with a number of other unidentified men. One of the victims observed a young man across the street signaling to Cowan and Long while pointing at the two victims. Fearing an imminent attack, the two men turned around and started walking back towards the convenience store. But before the two young men got there, Cowan and Long - together with their unidentified accomplices - attacked the two victims from behind.

Cowan struck one victim in the left side of his head and, after he turned to face him, Cowan demanded that the victim give up his jacket. The victim took off his jacket, threw it at Cowan, and ran inside the convenience store to call 9-1-1. The second victim was struck from behind and knocked to the ground. While second victim was huddled in the fetal position on the ground, Cowan and Long - along with their accomplices - repeatedly punched and kicked the second victim in the face and body. During the attack, Long demanded that the second victim give up his jacket. As the attack continued, Cowan (and possibly others in the group) repeatedly called the second victim a "faggot." Eventually the second victim took off his jacket and handed it to Long. The attack persisted, however, as both Cowan and Long continued kicking and punching the second victim as he lay on the ground.

As the beating continued, police arrived on the scene and the attackers fled. Cowan ran through an alley behind the convenience store while Long, who was not as quick to run, tried to avoid police detection by walking inside the convenience store. Witnesses on the scene pointed out Long to police, and he was placed under arrest. A short time later, Cowan returned to the scene - wearing the second victim's stolen jacket - and was apprehended by police. Cowan later provided a statement to police detectives during which he referred to the two victims as "the faggots," and admitted to using the word "faggot" during the attack. As a result of the beating, the second victim sustained lacerations to his face, as well as significant bruising to his ribs and back.

In announcing the guilty verdicts, U.S. Attorney Machen and MPD Chief Lanier praised the work of MPD Detectives Dan Lewis and James Tyler, as well as Officers Jeremy Verdon, William Bogner, and Felix Lina. They also acknowledged the efforts of members of the U.S. Attorneys's Office, including Litigation Technology Specialist Paul Howell, Paralegal Anthony Griffith, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven Swaney, who presented the case to the grand jury and handled the trial of this matter.

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